

Day 132 by Lollytree

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Summary:

During their year together, Chief Hopper deals with Eleven growing up in the cabin.

Day 132

Author's Note:

I just thought this was something that was bound to happen since Hopper was the only person in her life for awhile. Also, it was hilarious when he got all dad-worried over her dark makeup. TW: the period-typical attitudes tag also applies to the period-talk, since it would be very gendered there. 80's.

The cabin had to be swept often, or it becomes musty inside. The fireplace is the main source of warmth, but creates mounds of dust. The broom goes back and forth with her hands. Palms sweaty. It'd be easier to do in her head. It's a simple action to mimic, since he showed her how to clean. Well, it's not like she hasn't tried — “*Hey kid, you know you do have two hands.*”

So, she began filling her day with those hands. Turning pages manually, popping on records, making lunch — “*Real lunch, El.*”

But the TV is still in her head. The screen made sense. The morse code too. From her seat on the couch she would makes it click back and forth. Like the sweep of her broom, except not for the hands.

Today was like every other day. Boring afternoon. Day 132.

Except when he comes home. Jim Hopper. Although, she hardly calls him that. She doesn't really know *what* to call him. The strangest man.

But when he's near, she's happy. Like her heart isn't completely broken, just a bit bent. They mostly talk. He quizzes her on songs and books. He taught her how to do *important* things, like how to scramble eggs. He brought games and homework to fill her busy thoughts — “*It's called sudoku, you'll be good at it.*” That was wrong. She didn't understand it yet, but it makes her smile when she watches his brow furrow over the puzzling numbers, muttering under his breath.

But today feels strange. Hopper left in a hurry for work, so she snuck more Eggos despite his numerous attempts to go easy and eat “*some actual food, please.*”

As if microwaved meals were real. The leftover scraps from Mike’s family dinners were more desirable. But, overall, it’s better than the food at Papa’s lab (because the reward treats didn’t count, they were always too little). Eleven guesses she doesn’t mind microwaved corn and peas if it means Hopper sits across the table. The strange and funny man. And the sad eyes. Sometimes, like hers.

Still, this doesn’t stop her from eating two more Eggos. And now her lower stomach feels funny. Eleven wonders if Hopper was maybe right all along about the eating? Sickness doesn’t usually affect her this easily. She remembers the weeks spent in the cold winter, switching off from her body’s aching pain.

She stops her daily chores and lays on the old couch. Clenches her eyes and drifts away. There’s not always enough to do during the day and sleep comes easily. Even if nightmares beckon her with faces of the dead. Sometimes, the many (too many) faces she’s killed.

Blood everywhere. Blood down her nose.

Broken necks.

Their fault.

Her fault.

“*Eleven!*” a distant voice calls.

“I’m sorry!” she screams, jumping from the couch. She had learned to apologize a very long time ago — “*Sorry, Papa.*”

Except it’s only a dream, but she can’t shake the strange feeling in her body. An unfamiliar vibrant pain. Standing up, she suddenly feels the dampness below. Did she wet herself? When she was younger and awoke from lab experiments, it was often to the discovery of soaked pants.

But now it feels too heavy, so Eleven drops her jeans. And there it is

on her underwear. Blood. The blood from her dreams?

Did *she* make this happen?

“No, no.”

And her devastation increases when she searches from where the blood comes from. Why is this happening?

Why?

She's been horribly wounded. Somehow, somehow.

Eleven stretches out her hand out and compels her mind to stop this disaster, immediately. There's no longer a flow down her legs but when she feels her wound, the blood is still there. She hasn't gotten rid of it.

“Stop!” she screams.

Is a monster from the upside down living within her, killing her from the inside? Is this all because of Papa's tests? Will she die?

Eleven showers, quickly scrubbing herself clean. When the water is no longer red from her legs, she sees no more blood. It must have stopped for whatever reason. Her ragged breath begins to slow. Maybe it's over, maybe it's over.

Cautiously, she steps cautiously into her room, adrenaline releasing like hot air.

And then it's dripping down her leg again. The starkness of red against pale skin stuns her, contrasting terribly because she hardly sees the sun. She never will again. At least not like how she wished — pictures of kids on the TV running around in the sunlight. Freckled face. Friends all around (*her friends*).

“Why?” she cries.

Why her? Why always *her*?

With two shaking hands, she puts the stained jeans back on. What's

the point if she's going to ruin a new pair? What's the point if she's just going to die anyway.

"No."

No. She's doesn't want to die like this — halfway humiliated to death. She'll find anything she can before that happens. And fix this.

Turning on the TV, she puts the blindfold on. Clears her mind, wipes it clean. Till there's nothing left except darkness. So much darkness. It keeps coming, she feels it whip against her hands.

She runs from place to place. To moments where her name surely must be mentioned somewhere by one of the several government officials who tried to take her down. Someone must know *something*. Some file hidden away that would have predicted this inward destruction of hers. She runs and runs.

But nothing.

No no one is talking about her (not even Mike), even if it's too early for his daily radio call.

No hidden, secret moment that could explain such a disaster.

Wet eyes soak the blindfold. She's lost, and the darkness is too heavy. She's falling backwards and sideways, her stomach sinking. The TV zaps off, and Eleven tumbles back to the solid ground. Home.

There's nothing left she can do. Nothing left, now, except to die. She just hopes that Jim Hopper comes home to say goodbye before she goes. Clicks away at the morse code like it's a message in a bottle. She leans against the wall of the cabin and waits.

"Night Flo," Hopper says, waving goodbye over his shoulder to the surly secretary.

"Early day tomorrow," she calls after him.

But he's already out the door.

When he'd gotten off an hour early, Hopper wastes no time racing home. To the hidden girl stowed away like some messed up fairy-tale. Except it's no tall tale... with real-life magic, monsters waiting to gobble her up, and all that shit. He drives fast all the way home.

Till he's tapping their secret knock.

Once.

Twice.

No answer.

"El, c'mon," he halfway whispers. He's not naturally talented at whispering. Always present was a level of volume that could never quite escape.

Hopper taps harder. Until the door is swinging open in a great big hurry. He searches for her tiny stature, usually sitting on the couch or looking bored at the table. But Eleven isn't there. She's huddled on the floor, next to the corner wall.

"What's wrong?" He's rushing forward, immediately dropping down in front of her. Forgetting that he was going to brag how he came home early today.

Tear stains were present along with red eyes — how long had she been crying?

"I'm dying," she murmurs. Quietly informing him, an apology in her sad voice.

"What do you mean you're dying?" He raises his own voice, looking and seeing no visible threat. But he knows that not everything that goes on with her is *visible*.

"Bleeding to death..." Eleven thinks about all the blood she's seen in her life. The soldiers in the school, the demogorgon's feasts on the people of Hawkins, Papa's experiments on living creatures... If blood

doesn't stop, then you die.

"*What?* What happened?"

He stretches out one hand to her cheek, and the other to her shoulder. Inspecting her. He sounds so worried her heart breaks for him. Her friend. He'll miss her, she knows that. She's seen enough of the world, like Mike's parents and family all matched up. Couples and their kids. Yet he was all alone, so evidently. Until her. She knows Mike will be taken care of, but who will watch after Hopper?

So she moves her long flannel shirt out of the way to show the humiliating red stains on her jeans below. She still can't believe this is how it will happen, after *everything*.

"Oh shit," Hopper falters, looking down.

"Sorry." She turns away, it's too difficult.

"No, uh, *no* you're not dying. You're gonna be fine."

His hands doing most of the explaining. Her senses feel a different energy around him — a tense nervousness very alive, but his fear is gone.

"I should..." He starts to stand, and then swiftly crouches back down, almost in her face. "Wait, would you rather I explain things first, or go get you, uh, stuff to deal with this?"

"What?" she asks, confused by his reaction. Her tears momentarily on halt.

Hopper completely forgot about this part of life when bringing the girl home, like a puppy off the street. In fact, it didn't even register on his list of necessities. He'd bought supplies of non-perishable foods, stocked up on groceries as often as possible. Hauled in stacks of books and games and records. A hairbrush for that crazy growing hair of hers. Toothbrushes so she wouldn't get cavities. Toilet paper. Towels. Security systems so she won't be found. Kid stuff for this girl.

Yet, he still managed to scar the poor kid. He feels like a jackass.

But what could he have done — maybe brought in a woman to do this job for him? He almost wishes he could. Joyce would definitely help. But it's too risky for anybody to know, especially the Byers boys who'd alert their gaggle of friends and come running down to the cabin like it's a school trip. Then who knows who might be coming afterwards. Brenner and the rest of those evil sons of bitches.

"Look you're not dying, alright?" He rubs his hair. "Don't cry. You're just growing up, is all."

"What?" she repeats.

How does one explain this? It's not really a conversation he ever knew he'd be having — a girl who had *absolutely no idea* of what was going on with her body. He should have thought of bringing home one of those ridiculous pamphlets that explains everything better than he can.

"This is just something that eventually happens to women," Hopper quickly clarifies.

Then looks up in realization. "Not that you are one yet," he says, and points firmly at her. "This is just one of the many steps it can take. "

But her eyes are huge with disbelief.

It would be embarrassing enough to tell this to another girl, but everything is another universe for El. She's kind of like an alien attempting to adapt among humans. Eager to belong, but still trying to catch up. *Or maybe*, Hopper corrects himself, she's just a starved kid who's been kept hungry and locked away all her life.

"You know how kids grow up into men and women?"

She nods.

"Well, this is part of the process for girls..."

"Why blood..." Her voice muffled from her face pressed against curled

up knees.

"It's the body clearing and sorting things out from inside," he says, trying hard to think back to his shitty health class in high school. Or Diane's sparse explanations before Sarah was born.

"The body?"

She's so confused. If this is normal, why didn't anyone ever tell her? So she'd know not to be worried? The whole thing doesn't feel *normal* at all.

"Yeah, the organs inside." He looks away. "You know how men and women have different bodies, well you have different parts inside. That's why it's happening to you."

"Different than you?"

"Yeah," he dimly answers. This must be his weirdest conversation of the day, and he basically talks to crazy people for a living.

"Why from *there*?" she pointedly asks. The blood.

His face feels hot, his ears growing pink.

"Cause it means," he starts, momentarily wondering if he should just stop. "That someday in the way, way, way future.. you.. can have a baby."

Eleven stares at him, shocked, her fear on pause like she might start bleeding from her nose too.

"If you want," he says, motioning to her with a flimsy hand.

A baby?

"Me?" she whispers. A baby.

Do I have a mother?

Yeah of course you have a mother... you couldn't really be born without one.

Her mother is gone. But once upon a time she was somewhere. Somewhere out in the world. And somewhere, inside, El has changed. And knowing all of this, now, she felt a moment of closeness to the mother she never knew.

"How does a baby..."

"No no, whoa that's a story for a different day," he says, with urgency.

Maybe he'll just pick up some books from the library so she can read about it. Yet, something tells Hopper that he'll be the one re-explaining things, and he tries not to cringe at the thought. Because this is what he signed up for. There's going to be a whole mess of questions coming soon enough. Still, he doesn't regret it even if he really, really, really feels like flipping on the TV and changing to a new conversation. He can't mess up her life even more than what's been done to her.

"So I'm gonna make a run to the store to get some supplies."

"Supplies?" she asks, still quiet.

"Oh," he pauses. "You'll, well, so you can put it..."

Actually... he'll just give her the directions. He doesn't have to be *completely* perfect. "Just stuff so you won't have a mess, I'll get enough to last a few months."

He'll have to visit the convenient store outside town, because in this small community word gets around in an instant. Hopper could lie and say it was for a girlfriend, but he doesn't want to keep up the hassle. And... if Joy asks about it, he knows he'd break.

"How long?" she cries, hearing the length of time.

Shit, Hopper winces. "Oh, I forgot that part. It'll only last a few days. But it'll happen every month... I mean like every thirty days or so." He squints, feeling wrong, like he's delivering a punishment.

"Every thirty days?" Eleven's face pales.

"But you'll get used to it." He tries to reassure her. "Eventually it'll become old news." Maybe. Hopefully. He doesn't really know.

"Weird," she says, quiet again. But he can hear the pout.

She remains sitting on the floor looking pensive. Now that she wasn't dying she tries to adjust to the idea of living with this new... thing.

"Well," he announces. Patting her knee awkwardly, before standing to his full height. "I'll be back soon."

"Hm," she mutters, lost in thought.

"Hey, kid."

She turns to him. "Bet you miss being *eleven* right?" He jokes, smiling awkwardly. "Get it?"

"No."

"Cause you're twelve and got all this going on, but you're name still.."

She looks at him strangely. "You know your age," he sighs.

"Day 4534."

"Yeah twelve," he sighs again, giving up on the lame joke. "Okay, I'm gonna go."

El feels a panic run through her while watching him head for the door knob. Left behind again. Even if he's trying.

"Wait," she calls.

"Yes?"

There's bags under his eyes. She knows that's a sign of exhaustion. Sleep.

"Can I?"

It's always that. The outside.

"You know the rules," he says firmly.

She turns her head back to the wall.

"El, its for your own good. Go clean up and I'll be back soon."

"Be back soon," she parrots.

"I promise."

He always promised.